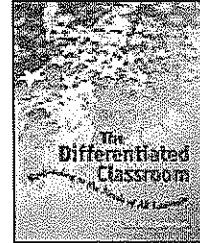


## Differentiated Classroom

by Carol Ann Tomlinson

Table of Contents



## An ASCD Study Guide for The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners

### Introduction

This Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding of *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, an ASCD book published in April 1999, by helping you make connections between the text and the school or district in which you work. Written by Carol Ann Tomlinson, this book addresses one of education's perennial challenges: How can teachers divide their time, resources, and efforts to effectively instruct so many students of diverse backgrounds, readiness levels, skill levels, interests, and ways of learning? Tomlinson describes a powerful response to this challenge: differentiated instruction. Drawing from recent theory and research on learning, and providing numerous examples from classrooms and schools, Tomlinson presents a convincing case that differentiation will help larger numbers of students flourish in our classrooms.

You can use this Study Guide before or after you have read the book, or as you finish each chapter. If you have not read the book already, you may wish to scan the Guide very quickly and highlight questions and instructions that are designed to prompt your thinking prior to your reading the text material carefully. The study questions provided are not meant to cover all aspects of the book but, rather, to address selected ideas we thought might warrant further reflection.

Most of the questions in this Study Guide are ones you can think about on your own. But you might also consider pairing with another colleague, or forming a group of people, who have read (or are reading) *The Differentiated Classroom*.

### Chapter 1—What is a Differentiated Classroom?

1. Read the portraits from schools on pages 3–7. In this section, Tomlinson provides glimpses into how teachers at the same grade level may approach differentiation very differently.
2. What are some key similarities between the teachers at each level (primary, elementary, middle, high school)? Some key differences?
3. What kind of teaching philosophy or modus operandi do you think each teacher in the examples reflect?
4. What are some of the specific strategies teachers in the examples use to address students learning needs?
5. In what ways do you think these strategies might be helpful in addressing academic diversity? In what ways might they be problematic?
6. Jot down some notes reflecting what you think might be some of the characteristics of the differentiated classroom, based on your reading thus far.

### Chapter 2—Examples of Differentiation

1. Tomlinson lists eight principles that guide differentiated instruction. To what extent is each of these principles reflected in your classroom or school?
2. Review Figure 2.1. This Figure provides an organizer for differentiation. Using the examples from Chapter 1, or from your own work with students, think about some ways that various attempts at differentiation fit into the organizer presented in Figure 2.1.
3. At this point in your reading, what are some of the hallmarks of the differentiated classroom? Note the comparison of differentiated and traditional classrooms in Figure 2.2. Can you think of other points of comparison?

## Chapter 3—Rethinking How We Do School—and for Whom

1. Before beginning the chapter, think about some ways that children at school seem to be different than children in the past. Also, reflect upon ways that our understanding about how humans learn has changed over the past quarter-century.
2. Read the background information on pages 18–21. List several implications for your school or classroom for the following issues Tomlinson writes about:
  - Intelligence is varied rather than singular.
  - The brain hungers for meaning.
  - Humans learn best with moderate challenge.
  - Increasing variety in the students we teach.
  - The struggle for equity and excellence.
3. Tomlinson draws contrasts between traditional school environments and strategies and those that reflect a differentiated approach. What are some reasons that traditional techniques continue to predominate in schools?
4. What are some of the goals you have for students as learners? How might these goals reflect a differentiated approach—or could they?

## Chapter 4—Learning Environments That Support Differentiation

1. Tomlinson raises questions about teachers' images of themselves as leaders of instruction, and how this relates to differentiation. If you could observe yourself, what image of teaching would you see? How might this facilitate differentiation or make it more of a challenge to implement in the classroom?
2. Review the description of learning environments in pages 25–29, including Tomlinson's description of her colleague, Mary Ann Smith. What do you think some of the intangible factors might be in a classroom that reflects differentiation? What's the "hidden curriculum" that may not be stated explicitly but is present in this classroom nonetheless?
3. On pages 31–34, Tomlinson lists some principles for a healthy school environment. Before reading this material, jot down some attributes of such an environment, based on what you've read so far as well as your own experience. After reading the list, what additional attributes would you add to your list?

## Chapter 5—Good Instruction as the Basis for Differentiated Teaching

1. Why is it so critical for teachers planning to differentiate to specify the outcomes or

goals for student learning? What's gained by doing so? Lost by not doing so?

2. Review Figure 5.1, which gives examples of different levels of student learning. Think of one unit that you teach. What are its key facts, concepts, principles, attitudes, and skills?
3. Using the primary concept or unit you fleshed out in the example above, review Figure 5.2. What are some initial thoughts you have about how your concept or unit might fit into Figure 5.2? What are some of the content, process, and product dimensions?
4. Review the example of Ms. Johnson on pages 44–46. What are some ways that she differentiates content, process, and product for her middle schoolers? Make a list of the challenges she might face in carrying out the unit. How might she—or you—surmount such challenges?

## Chapter 6—Teachers at Work Building Differentiated Classrooms

1. Scan the material on pages 49–53 to find the grade level you teach, or the one you're most interested in. Using the example, clarify what the author means by "differentiate what," "differentiate how," and "differentiate why."
2. Pages 54–60 include more extended examples of teachers applying principles of differentiation in their classroom. Carefully read the example that you find most interesting or relevant to your work. What are the kinds of decisions the teacher had to make to create and teach the unit?
3. Now think about an example from your own curriculum and classroom. How might you answer the "what, why, and how" questions?

## Chapter 7—Instructional Strategies That Support Differentiation

1. Before reading the chapter, briefly skim the subheads to see what instructional strategies will be discussed (e.g. stations, agendas, complex instruction, etc.). Then choose one strategy to read and think about in more depth.
2. For your chosen strategy, think about the following issues:
  - How does the strategy support differentiated approaches?
  - What are some of the key facets of the strategy?
  - Would the strategy fit within your "toolbox" of instructional techniques? Why or why not?
  - How could you begin to use the instructional strategy within a differentiated unit?

## Chapter 8—More Instructional Strategies to Support Differentiation

1. Repeat the Study Guide questions just listed for Chapter 7.
2. When you've completed this task for Chapter 8, think about how you might proceed to implement a strategy as part of a differentiated activity or unit in your classroom:
  - Where can you find more information about the strategy used? (Note—some background material to get you started is available at the end of Chapter 8.)
  - On what basis will you select the unit or activity to be differentiated?

- What will be the learning outcomes for your students?
- What are the different aspects of students' readiness, skill levels, or interests that you'll be attending to?
- What are some other considerations or factors you need to consider to implement this activity or unit?

## Chapter 9—How Do Teachers Make It All Work?

1. Read the five tips Tomlinson gives for "Getting Started" with Differentiation (pages 96–99). For each tip, jot down one or two things you could do to support differentiation in your classroom using that tip.
2. The section entitled "Settling In for the Long Haul" (pages 99–101) suggests making students partners in differentiation. How might you make the precepts and tools of differentiation an explicit part of your work with students, so that they view it as a natural part of learning the curriculum?
3. Before reading "Some Practical Considerations" and "Developing a Support System" (pages 101–107), reflect on what you've learned about differentiation so far in the book. What do you think are some of the practical challenges in implementing differentiated approaches? Where might you go for support in your differentiation effort? Make a short list in response to these questions.
4. Read the material on pages 101–107 and review your list. Are there challenges you still need help with? Sources of support you need to tap into? Where might you go to get additional information on these options?

## Chapter 10—When Educational Leaders Seek Differentiated Classrooms

1. Review the recommendations for beginning to work with differentiation (pages 108–115). For some of these tips, map out some concrete steps you could take to make them doable in your situation.
2. What are some elements you'd use in a staff development program on differentiation?
3. Think about the characteristics of excellent teaching practice in light of what you've learned in this book about differentiated classrooms. What are some of these characteristics? How do they reflect some of the ideas and principles of differentiation? Compare your notes on these questions to the material in Figure 10.2.

*The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* is by Carol Ann Tomlinson. This 132-page 8" x 10" book (Stock No. 199040) is available from ASCD for \$17.95 (ASCD member) and \$21.95 (nonmember). To order a copy, call ASCD at 1-800-933-2723 (in Virginia 1-703-578-9600) and press 2 for the Service Center. Or buy the book from ASCD's Online Store.

### Table of Contents

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